

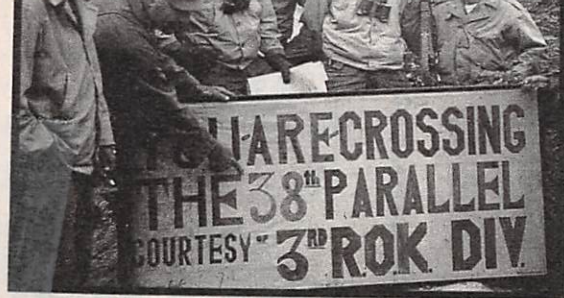
Withdrawal from Chosin Reservoir on Dec. 1, 1950.

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when the Soviet-backed army of North Korea smashed across the 38th Parallel to attack the marginally democratic Republic of Korea. With UN approval, the U.S. intervened, halting the Communists at the Naktong River. Then came Gen. Douglas MacArthur's brilliant end run at Inchon, the recapture of Seoul and the sprint north. But as winter approached, with temperatures at -20°F , about half a million Chinese came south, prolonging the fighting. The war ended with an armistice on July 27, 1953. It was an uneasy truce: Today, 35,000 American troops still are dug in, their weapons pointing north.



Jeffrey L. Ward

**"Maybe a million of us went to Korea.
If we got lucky, a John Chafee was**



The first UN troops cross the 38th Parallel on Sept. 29, 1950, after repulsing the North Korean attack of June.

the Marines we passed—not idle chat but about enemy activity, addressing each man by his last name, the troops calling him “Skipper.” No one was up-tight in the captain’s presence, and the men spoke right up in answering. When enemy infantry are that close, both the questions and answers are important.

When I got there as a replacement rifle-platoon leader on Thanksgiving weekend of 1951, the 1st Marine Division was hanging on to a mountainous corner of North Korea along the Musan Ridge, about 3000 feet high. It took us a couple of hours to hike uphill, lugging rifles and packs along a narrow, icy footpath

there to lead us.”

to where the rifle companies were dug in. As fresh meat, not knowing the terrain and nervous about mines, we followed close on the heels of Marines returning to duty after being hit in the hard fighting to take Hill 749 in September.

In Korea they didn’t send you home with wounds. Not if they could patch you up to fight again. These Marines, tough boys, understandably weren’t thrilled to be going back. But they went. Dog Company of the 7th Marine Regiment needed them. There was already a foot of snow on the ground. When I think of Korea, it is always of the cold and the snow.

Yet the fighting began in summer, on a Sunday morning—June 25, 1950—when the Soviet-backed army of Communist North Korea smashed across the 38th Parallel to attack the marginally democratic Republic of Korea with its U.S. trained and equipped (and not very good) army. Early in the war, Gen. Douglas MacArthur had bragged: “The

boys could be home for Christmas.” But “the boys” would be in Korea three Christmases—courtesy of the Chinese Army.

Every soldier thinks his own war was unique. But Korea did have its moments: proving a UN army could fight; ending MacArthur’s career, with a farewell address to Congress (“Old soldiers never die. They just fade away...”); helping elect Eisenhower, who pledged in ’52, “I will go to Korea”; demonstrating that Red China’s huge army could be stopped; in-

sulating Japan from attack; and enabling the South Korean economic miracle. But the war’s lack of a clear-cut winner and loser may have set the stage for Vietnam.

As a junior officer, I had little grasp of such strategic matters. I commanded 40 Marines, combat veterans who had fought both the Chinese and the North Koreans. Captain Chafee led us; Red Philips was his No. 2; Bob Simonis, Mack Allen and I were his three rifle-platoon leaders.

continued



IN MEMORY

In the 37 months that the Korean War raged, thousands of Americans died. (For years, the number was thought to be 54,000 but recently was revised to 36,900.) More than 8000 are still missing. Yet only in 1995 was a national memorial finally dedicated. It includes a black granite wall with murals and stainless-steel statues of infantrymen slogging up a Korean hill. You can visit it at the National Mall in Washington, D.C.